

A UU-nique place

Retreat center
gets new leadership

By Matthew Nadler
MNADLER@CNC.COM

DUXBURY — For 25 years, the Cedar Hill Retreat Center has been tucked away off Standish Street, a place for area Unitarian Universalists to relax and reflect.

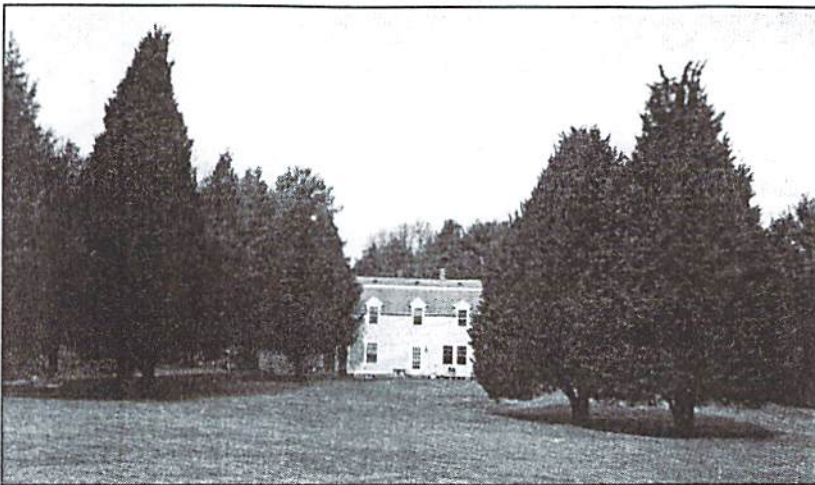
Compared to other religious centers in town, it's a fairly small place, just a single house and a path that leads down to a small beach on Kingston Bay.

Over time, it has become worn down, but now with an influx of money, and a change in ownership, Cedar Hill may be poised for a revival.

During the past decade, Cedar Hill Board member Sharon Nabreski, of Pembroke, said, the church district operating it lost interest in running Cedar Hill. "They weren't committed to it," she said.

But, she said, there were "a lot of people who were passionate about this place. A lot of people over the years have worked very hard to keep it functioning."

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STAFF PHOTO/MATTHEW NADLER

The Cedar Hill Retreat Center, on Standish Street in Duxbury, is under new management.

Cedar Hill spun off from Unitarian church

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"It was barely up to specs," Rich Evans said. Evans, of Westerly, R.I., is the president of the Cedar Hill Retreat Center Inc., which now owns the facility.

Having started to fix up the building and preserve its "beach-house feel," the new owners' next step is to drum up more business, Evans explained.

A goal is to get more day use out of the facility and to attract a wider variety of clients, including educational seminars and corporate meetings.

So far, "We've been doing pretty well," Evans said, noting that most business has come via word of mouth.

"The niche of Cedar Hill is being small, secluded and private," Evans said.

It had been owned and operated by the Ballou-Channing District, which is the administrative body for Unitarian Universalist churches in Southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Now, in a move that might sound familiar to a venture capitalist, Cedar Hill has been spun off from the Ballou-Channing District and plans are being developed to make it a place for conferences and retreats for all.

The change was spurred by fears that, strapped for funds, the Ballou-Channing District might look to sell some of the property to a developer. Instead, according to

Nabreski, with a donation from an abutting property owner, a deed restriction was sold for \$3 million. Now, 10 of the site's 12 acres are protected from development under a deed restriction administered by the Wildlands Trust.

The donation was made to the Ballou-Channing District with the intent that a deed restriction would be put in place, Doug Friesen, of Duxbury, another member of the new board, explained.

"It is the best possible outcome," he said. There was some concern that the original deed restriction, written when the land was donated to the church by Rosamond Allen, was due to expire in 2010.

According to Ballou-Channing District Executive the Rev. William Zelazny, the interest from its share of the proceeds would be "used to provide services and programming to the member congregations of the Ballou-Channing District."

Meanwhile, Evans explained, the money was split between the Ballou-Channing District and a newly formed company called the Cedar Hill Retreat Center Inc, which will now operate the center. It's no longer a Unitarian Universalist Retreat Center, but "that's our heritage," Evans said, and a majority of board members must be Unitarians.